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ABSTRACT

Three small rural school districts in Montana and Wyoming used alternate school day scheduling to make time for staff and curriculum development inservice programs. The schedule of one short and four long days delivered the instructional time of 175 6-hour days each year. Benefits of alternate scheduling included time for regular inservice activities at no additional cost and without intruding on activity or private time, time for staff and student "necessary" absences, and increased family time for students. Disadvantages included time limits of 2 hours on inservice programs, scheduling of inservice programs during late afternoon after a nearly full teaching day, staff resentment that they also did not have a short work day, and additional child care needed on early dismissal days. Adoption of the programs required local hearings where concerns were voiced about lengthening days for children bused long distances and other work commitments of bus drivers. Community cooperation resolved most problems. During the 2-year inservice program staff members chose among programs in elements of instruction, teacher welfare, Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement, and thinking skills. Total cost for the successful program was $2,000. (LFL)

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RURAL INSERVICE USING ALTERNATE SCHEDULING

A Presentation to

The National Council of States
on Inservice Education

November 21-25, 1986
Nashville, Tennessee

by

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Introduction

In very small school districts it is difficult to find time to implement inservice programs for teachers because of the many demands made on their time.

For, example, in a small district high school with fewer than twenty teachers it is still necessary that all the sports teams be coached, the plays directed, the clubs sponsored, and the curriculum developed. Nearly all teachers in such schools serve dual and triple roles. Many of these functions are performed both during and after the regular school day and often on weekends.

As a result of this loading of staff, only the immediate and pressing functions are properly performed. Consequently, staff development and curriculum development activities are often left undone or done in a cursory fashion if they are done at all.

At the same time, the students of small rural schools require quality educational services equal to or better than those of nonrural students. Delivery of quality programs in the rural setting also requires equal planning and implementation effort.

The development of teachers to meet the challenges of providing good instruction is also equally important, if not more important, because of the need for rural school teachers to be generalists rather than specialists within each area taught.

Due to time and financial constraints, inservice in many rural schools is also neglected or at best is a series of "one shot" day-long sessions with an imported expert with little or no follow-up to the session. These are generally acknowledged to not

be very effective for long-term results. Well-planned and implemented inservice programs are difficult to provide because of the time commitments of the staff.

The Alternative Scheduling Concept

In seeking an answer to the problem of how to provide quality staff development activities, the author considered a variety of approaches and decided to use an alternative schedule. The use of an alternative schedule provided several benefits:

1. Time for inservice activities on a regular basis at no additional cost to school district.

2. Time for staff "necessary" absences, such as for medical or business appointments, providing for more teacher contact time with students.

3. Time for staff development and curriculum development meetings without intruding on activity or private time.

4. Time for student "necessary" absences, such as for medical or business appointments resulting in less student absences.

5. Increased family time for students.

Several of these benefits do not relate directly to staff development, but they do relate to improvement of instructional effectiveness and were perceived as additional reasons implementing this program.

There were also several disbenefits that were perceived as part of the alternative scheduling concept:

1. Most inservice activities would have to fit into a narrow time frame of approximately two hours or extend into activity and private time.

2. The inservice programs would occur during the least productive time of the day, late afternoon, after a nearly full day of teaching.

3. Unless the released time was used productively, staff would resent the fact that they did not have a short work day also.

4. Working parents would need additional child care on early dismissal days.

Several alternative schedules were studied. These included the four-day week, the four and a half day week, and the partial alternative schedule. Because most of the alternatives had primarily been designed for other purposes than for the provision of staff development time, the criteria for selection were also different. As a result of the study of the various alternatives, it was decided to implement a short schedule one day per week which approximated, but did not exactly equal a four and one-half day week.

The schedule for a typical week appears as Appendix A. Note that it delivers the amount of instructional time normally delivered in 175 six hour days each year, by lengthening four days and shortening one. In one district in which the author worked, the shortened day was Thursday. In two others, the shortened day was Friday.

Selling the Proposal

In Wyoming, alternative schedules of any type were declared to be unlawful by district courts in 1983. In the 1985 legislative session alternative schedules were made legal provided they were adopted after two local hearings and approved by the State Board of Education. Renewal of the program is to occur only after an extensive evaluation of the program and another local hearing.

In Montana, the other state in which the author implemented alternative schedules, local board approval was all that was necessary. Even so, adoption was a lengthy process designed to ensure public support.

The principal concerns of faculty, patrons, and Board members observed by the author were the following:

1. Lengthening of an already long school day for students who ride buses long distances (up to forty-five miles each way). Part of the reason for adopting a modified four and one-half day week was to allow for no change in current bus schedules. This negated this objection to a longer school day.

2. Classroom schedules at the secondary level were changed to meet the new schedule and faculty members sometimes had difficulty adjusting to the different times. This problem took care of itself after about six weeks under a new schedule.

3. Bus drivers, most of whom had other employment, had difficulty meeting their short-day afternoon schedules due to other work commitments. This problem required adjustments on the part of the drivers.

4. Working parents had to arrange for additional daycare for their children. This was not a major problem in any of the communities in which the schedule was adopted, but in one of the Montana communities the local Future Homemakers of America Chapter provided daycare for some of the children as a club money-making project.

The proposal required the approval of all the various publics involved. These included the teaching and support staff, the Board, parents, and the students. Informational meetings

were held with "brainstorming" sessions to refine the concept to meet the needs of the local district. A major component was how the released time would be used by each of the various groups involved in the school. This is the stage at which the inservice component was introduced to staff. Care was taken at this point to see that staff was involved in the needs assessment and the designing of the inservice program to meet specified school district goals and priorities.

Planning the Inservice Program

Once the program was approved, implementation and planning of the inservice activities was undertaken. The companion presentation to this one, by Dr. Susan Clark, outlines the processes followed in the district to ascertain needs and design the programs.

The Inservice Program

A two-year program of inservice activities was set up. The first year objective was to introduce the elements of instruction through the Madeline Hunter model and provide a series of short teacher welfare and special topics presentations for follow-up the second year. The second year program was designed to implement the elements of instruction, Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (TESA), and thinking skills techniques.

It was a goal of the project to offer at least two inservice programs per month and to have all staff members receive at least thirty clock hours of instruction during the year. The time was

also to be used for curriculum study and instructional problem solving, as well. The following listing shows scheduling for the first year of the project:

9/20 Orientation meeting
9/27 Tort Law for Teachers
10/11 Curriculum meeting - General Planning Session
10/18 Special Education referrals and legal requirements
10/25 Computers in the Classroom - Introduction
11/1 Word Processing in the Classroom
11/8 Writing Activities for the Classroom
11/22 Time management for teachers and students
12/6 Approaches to school discipline
12/13 Teaching special students in the classroom
1/10 Understanding Wyoming School Finance
1/17 Elements of Instruction I
1/24 Elements of Instruction II
1/31 Elements of Instruction III
2/7 Teacher made tests I
2/14 Teacher made tests II
2/21 Teacher made tests III
2/28 Learning Styles
3/7 Child Abuse and the School
3/14 Effective Schools I
3/21 Effective Schools II
4/4 Modality Based Instruction (Barbe)
4/11 Curriculum Wrap-up Meeting
4/18 Evaluation and Planning for Next Year

Because not all staff were interested or needed to participate in all but a few mandatory sessions (e.g. Elements of Instruction), nearly all sessions were voluntary. However, whenever a session was being offered teachers were required to be in the building working and not away from the building. This kept attendance at a high level, but allowed teachers to do other work if they felt the inservice was not appropriate.

Several of the programs (e.g. the writing and computer sessions) were introductory sessions appropriate for all staff and followed by extension courses offered through an area community college or the University of Wyoming. Using the session as a recruitment device ensured the ability to bring

college credit programs to our campus.

Nearly all the inservices were conducted using local, inexpensive resources, or in the case of one or two, local persons were sent from the district to be trained and then returned to train the other staff. The total cost for the entire program was approximately $2000, including the training.

Results and Conclusions

The alternate schedule proved to be a qualified success as an inservice device. The district had set an informal goal of thirty clock hours of inservice for each staff member. This was met by 67% of the staff. All the staff had at least 25 hours of inservice training during the Friday sessions.

The staff felt that the program, while intended to be introductory the first year, was too fragmented and that the series all pertaining to one topic (E.g. Teacher Made Tests) were most effective. They opted to be involved in implementing effective schools concepts and in the TESA workshops in the ensuing year. It was also decided to offer credit classes during the inservice sessions in science activities and thinking skills.

The were other benefits of the program. Student attendance improved slightly, from 95.7% to 96.3%, but time lost due to activity travel was reduced from 706 student day equivalents (SDE) to 559 SDE. Teacher attendance also improved from 97.5% to 98.8% with a 25% reduction in lost activity days.

The major disbenefit of the program was that a large number of staff members also wanted the time off even though their work day was not lengthened Monday through Thursday. Parents were

overwhelmingly favorable to the program, with the only complaints being related to daycare.

As a result of the evaluation of the project and the support of the staff and patrons, the program was approved for an additional two years by the local Board and the Wyoming Board of Education.

APPENDIX A

Typical Weekly Schedule

Monday	8:15-12:00	12:45-3:30	6:30
Tuesday	8:15-12:00	12:45-3:30	6:30
Wednesday	8:15-12:00	12:45-3:30	6:30
Thursday	8:15-12:00	12:45-3:30	6:30
Friday	8:15-12:00	12:45-1:40	4:30
	Total		30:30